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"ENHANCING LIFE"

"If man is the highest product of creation, the civilization must be judged, not by what man produces, but by the manner of the man produced."
Henderson

Life-enhancing Qualities of the Arts

Our western world is experiencing both the death and birth pains of a great culture. Some men and women are steadily dehumanizing themselves, and man is becoming an end in himself. There is a movement toward all-or-nothing attitudes, where people seek quick and easy slogan-inspired solutions rather than accept gradual progress based on reason and objectivity. The former method, though popular, often results in frustration and a loss of self-restraint, self-control, and ultimately, personal dignity.

Hence, the need to raise man to nobility. We need to take the time to think, to pause, and to perceive the problems of our culture. We somehow need to see what lies outside our isolated experience and discover what contributions are ours to make in raising individuals to distinctiveness and dignity. We should aim not just to preserve but to enhance life.

The technical achievements of our society are rewarded far more than human values and human relationships. Because of this imbalance, we often have difficulties relating to each other. Technology seems to almost drown us in our own waste. The challenge is to bring character into the lives of men and women

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so that, in turn, they can use these technological achievements for the betterment of mankind. For instance, our present energy crisis, difficult as it is, may be a blessing, even an opportunity to help us rediscover ourselves, become more creative and imaginative in our living.

Art is for life, not life for art. Our museums may exhibit how life and organic art have been, but this does not give us the crowning value of our own creativity. We cannot afford to ritualize expression and accept it on historical grounds alone. Artistic experience and expression must be welded with the individual soul of man. Albert Schweitzer said in reference to musical art that "all true and deeply felt music, journeys to heights where art and religion can always meet."

1. VALUES AND PURPOSES

Values and purposes are absolutely essential elements in the development of any worthwhile human endeavor. We must have a basic philosophical understanding of human dignity and individual worth.

The actual experiences of one's life are only a small portion of one's full development. What truly governs our lives is our feelings. On the whole, how we feel about things is more important than what we think about them. The arts invoke feeling and thus can serve as a humanizing force, guiding individuals toward sensitivity of the soul and richer expression. Values and purposes, there-

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fore, should be at the heart of our programs because the arts have the power to edify, uplift, and gratify like nothing intellectual. Intellect, by contrast, generally agonizes the soul when applied to emotional dilemmas.

The arts can lift individuals to higher realms of spirituality. Realizing this, we should learn how to humanize man, to use the arts to uplift and inspire, to understand the importance of meaning, emotion, and feeling and to rise above mediocre levels of appreciation. We can live with physical handicaps, but we cannot live with handicapped hearts and souls. The arts possess the power to lift the soul of man. We then, should recognize, even seize, this power and aim to move the mightiest of human elements--the individual spirit.

2. TASTE

The measure of any culture is determined by the degree and quality of taste that have been developed therein. So also does taste measure, in some degree, the individual. The overall attitude a person possesses toward the arts indicates his degree of taste. A musical performance invokes an aura of immediacy and excitement as a result of the visual, mental, and emotional sensations the listener experiences. Acquiring sensitivity to the tonal materials of the arts is one of the great challenges in developing good taste.

Everyone has the capacity to enjoy the arts; consequently, every person has the ability and, if opportunity provides, the obligation to develop to the highest degree of excellence his response to the best of the arts. If properly sought, the

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arts can give unlimited opportunities throughout one's life for continual individual enrichment, relaxation, appreciation, and aesthetic pleasure.

The arts plead for an openness of spirit, an absence of defenses that keep us from learning, and a willingness to discover more about ourselves. It requires integrity, honesty, concentration, and unity of being. The arts ask us to not fear or withhold our expressions. True taste requires we be honest with the response that the arts invokes from us.

3. TALENT

Pablo Cassals, the cellist, once said that music or any other form of art cannot be an answer in itself. Music must serve a purpose; it must be a part of humanity. A musician is also a man, and more important than his music is his attitude toward life, nor can the two be separated.

Sometimes we have misunderstandings about the talents we possess. Through the use of the parables in St Matthew in the New Testament, (i.e., the hidden treasure, the sower and the seed), we are taught the responsibility that comes with the talents that all possess. Cassels also says this about talent:

Don't be vain because you happen to have talent. What you do with your talent is what matters. You must cherish this gift, do not demean or waste what you have; work, work constantly and nourish it. There is no substitute for work, what seems easy performance comes from the greatest labor. Facility results only from maximum effort. Art is the product of labor.

4. ENNOBLING EMOTIONS

Expressive musical performance is the ultimate aim of the musician. Within every performer must burn a compelling desire for creative interpretation of every musical element of a composition. This passion joins the performer's inspirational, interpretive, and artistic skills. It is a vital part of the whole. A true performing artist is continually reaching beyond the artist's skill and the composer's notation.

The arts should be closely cognate with the soul of man, not the material and technical aspect of life. We should provide opportunities for richer lives and should allow individuals to ennoble their emotions and celebrate their divine senses and feelings. Expressively performed, the arts serve to uplift, edify, even humanize those both performing and listening. David Mannes has said:

"Above all--at least to me--music is the perfect universal language. This is a platitude only because it happens like other platitudes to be based on incontrovertible truth. The only times when I have witnessed a state approaching the brotherhood of man have been moments of music, when hundreds of hearts beat to the same rhythm and lifted to the same phrase and when all hate, all envy, all greed were washed away by the nobility of sound. Words are so often the agents of destruction; music--good music can only build. And to learn the language of music--or at least to respond to it--one needs only an ear and a heart. It is only the deaf or spiritually atrophied who do not somehow feel themselves exalted and purified in the presence of great music."

5. SELF-RENEWAL

The arts power to renew the self is made evident by the many forms and styles of the arts. We should not limit ourselves to only one kind of art. The variety we can find in the arts, i.e., in all culturally uplifting media, continually edify and in effect renew those truly seeking the gifts of the arts.

How long will we keep the capacity to learn? How long will we embrace the desire to discover or thrill at new adventure? And how long will we strive toward lively intellectual and cultural interests? Will we be fixed and trapped like a gnarled tree trunk when we reach the apex in our development of taste and appreciation? The idea of self-renewal is to continually reflect on our lives, to question where we are, what we are doing, and what we know. Despite what we have achieved, as individuals we should ask ourselves often, "Am I striving for higher goals?"

Robert Schumann said that "art is to send light into depths of men's hearts." The arts give joy now and forever. It subtly brings sensitivity to the soul, the feelings, and the expressions. It opens channels of communication and can lift individuals to higher realms of mortal existence.

May we each leave here today knowing who we are and will continue to enhance the lives of people.